

BRIDGET MACDONALD, ARCADIA

6 September – 6 October 2012

“In May 2011 I visited Arcadia in Greece for the first time. On the coast it was hot and orange blossom scented the air but in the mountains of Arcadia it was an earlier season of plum and apple blossom, walnut orchards were just coming into leaf and there were small flocks of sheep and goats, even an old shepherd with a ragged flock. In October we returned for a road trip which took in Delphi, Olympia, and the temple to Apollo at Bassae in Arcadia. It was still warm enough to swim in the Gulf of Corinth but in Arcadia there were wild storms followed by a sharp frost. An old woman running a tiny roadside cafe in her front room gave us her own walnuts, raki and bread. On the television in the corner we could see rioting in Athens, smoke, cars overturned, politicians gesticulating. The troubles which were building up in May had reached boiling point by October but there were few signs of strife in the countryside. “

(from the artist's introductory essay)

Macdonald's drawings in charcoal and graphite evoke the space and light of these remote landscapes and find associations in the English countryside. She traces our relationship with the rural scene back to its roots in Ancient Greece through a series of oblique connections. The living presence of animals and humans make their appearance, or man's occupancy is implied by a crumbling stone wall in *Mycenae*, the broken pediment in *Epidaurus*, or the classically inspired greenhouse at Croome Park, near her home. While places are significant for Macdonald, so is a core inner landscape of connections, memories and associations.

She grew up on the Isle of Wight and now lives and works on the Herefordshire/Worcestershire borders where rivers, hills and farms reflect the ideal pastoral landscape. In an essay 'The Inherited Tradition' the writer Sheila McGregor reminds us that Macdonald is acutely aware of the long and complex process of literary and pictorial exchange which shaped the Arcadian tradition.

Sometimes she suggests a darker side of landscape, its status as a place in which human emotions and conflicts are played out. It is the tension between things observed and things remembered, between the immediacy of a specific visual stimulus and a process of retrospective distillation, that gives her work its power.

While Greece remains at the forefront of the current Euro crisis, with an angered and divided populace, Macdonald's contemplative body of drawings and a few exquisite small paintings of bay leaves, recall what Greece has offered European culture in the past, and serve perhaps as an ironic reminder of how the brittle and impatient demands or needs of a modern culture can overwhelm and alter the present.

Bridget Macdonald trained in Fine Art in the mid 80's at the School of Art and Design, Wolverhampton Polytechnic, and lives and works in Great Malvern, Worcestershire. Her work is in the collections of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Worcester City Art Gallery, The new House of Lords building, Millbank, and in private collections in the UK, the USA, Italy and France.

An illustrated catalogue accompanies this exhibition. For a printed copy please contact the gallery, or for your convenience, there is an online link:

<http://www.artfirst.co.uk/ebooks/bridget-macdonald/arcadia/index.html>

For Further information please contact Clare Cooper or Benjamin Rhodes: 020 7734 0386